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# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ON ORGANIZATIONS

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## *Preface*

We all have heard that the military has made substantial progress in dealing with diversity. However, with the recent problems of sexual harassment surfacing in the different services, I have to question this progress. Why do we continue to have these problems? Personally, I feel there is a lack of training. A two hour class on sexual harassment or cultural diversity isn't enough to get to the root causes of these problems. Though this paper only scratches the surface of the diversity issue in the military, the research made me examine my own feelings and attitudes and recognize areas where I can learn more and make changes. I hope this paper will encourage others to do the same—we owe it to ourselves, our peers and the people we lead.

I'd like to thank my faculty research advisor, Major Scott Morgan. He planted the seed for this paper and provided insightful feedback and research guidance throughout. I would also like to thank Major Ed Browne who also took the time to review my paper and provided additional ideas for consideration.

### ***Abstract***

This research paper presents information on the importance of understanding the impact of cultural diversity on organizations. Starting with a historical background of how the military has handled diversity, the stages from “grudging acceptance” to “valuing differences and managing diversity” are explained. It further lays a foundation by discussing several factors such as stereotyping, prejudice and ethnocentrism that affect the diversity climate as presented in a model developed by Taylor Cox, Jr. It is from this basic framework that tools such as empowerment, training, and mentoring are presented for leaders to consider when dealing with diversity in their organization. Finally, these tools are interrelated to a five-step continuous process developed by Ann M. Morrison that a leader can use in analyzing the diversity climate of their organization.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*Every Air Force member deserves the opportunity to achieve his or her own potential, and to work and live in an environment that values human dignity and is free of discrimination. Each one of us, whether military or civilian, plays a key role in creating and maintaining this kind of working and living climate.*

Sheila E. Widnall  
Secretary of the Air Force  
General Ronald R. Fogleman  
Chief of Staff, USAF

The social composition of the military is changing. Realizing that the military is a reflection of American society, statistics show that the number of minorities and women in the armed services is on the rise and probably will continue to rise. Several factors may account for this increase such as commitment of the military leadership to nondiscrimination and emphasis on equal-opportunity education. However, with the recent allegations of sexual harassment in the Army and the reminder of Tailhook in the not too distant past, we have to ask ourselves if the services are on the right track as far as leadership commitment and education. Leadership commitment and education in understanding and managing diversity have been reactions to problems that surfaced. Seldom has the military taken proactive action to prevent diversity problems before they occur. Nonetheless, it appears that the senior leadership is now beginning to understand the importance of managing diversity and are taking action to ensure others understand.



Education is key to understanding and managing diversity. Currently, each of the services offers courses developed by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) at Patrick AFB, Florida. These are short, quick courses on specific issues such as equal opportunity, sexual harassment, and cultural diversity. At the present time, no course is offered to all military members that encompass the whole spectrum of understanding and managing diversity. Senior leadership (general officers) receive a two-day course that briefs issues such as socialization, power and discrimination, racism, diversity management, extremism and other issues that are critical to understanding and managing diversity. But, is it enough for just the senior leadership to receive this education? What about the mid-level managers, squadron commanders, group commanders and others that are in leadership/supervisory positions? They, too, deal with these issues on a day-to-day basis.

The first step in putting these mid-level managers and future squadron commanders on the right track in understanding and managing diversity is by providing information. Starting with the background of diversity in the military, the stages of progression from grudging acceptance to valuing differences and managing diversity are discussed. Because the military has progressed through these stages to the point of managing diversity, Chapter 3 analyzes a model that shows how diversity can impact an organization. Specifically, the diversity climate is examined by defining factors such as stereotyping, prejudice and ethnocentrism. Finally, several tools that would benefit a leader or supervisor are presented in Chapter 4. These tools can be used if you are a supervisor of one person or several hundred personnel.

## Chapter 2

### **From Grudging Acknowledgment to Managing Diversity**

It has been said that if we don't learn from the past, we are sure to repeat the same mistakes. That holds true with the evolution of understanding diversity in the military. Just as we have progressed through various styles of management over the past 20 years, we have also progressed through several phases of dealing with diversity in the military. There are many factors impacting the effectiveness of the military today: race, gender, culture and sexual orientation. By examining how the military has handled these factors in its past history, we will be able to determine the path we need to use in the future. In his book, *Managing Diversity in Organizations*, Robert T. Golembiewski discusses five phases of diversity that have been evident in military history. These phases have laid the foundation for managing diversity and have set the course for the future of the workforce in a diverse climate.<sup>1</sup> To better understand this evolution, each of these phases will be examined starting with the late 1800s.

The first phase Golembiewski calls, "Stepping tentatively forward, then resolutely back: grudging and temporary acknowledgments of diversity under duress."<sup>2</sup> History shows us that the military has not always addressed social problems in the military head on—symptoms are treated but not the causes. Thus, the problem never really disappears. In looking at the past, the military gave diversity attention only when necessary. The

result was temporary and usually created a backlash of resentment. In 1940, the Selective Service Act was signed by Franklin Roosevelt which prohibited racial discrimination in the armed forces. That not being successful, in 1948, Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 that mandated gradual integration of the military. But, what most people don't understand or know is that blacks were part of the military system long before 1940. The first black person graduated from one of our service academies in 1877 followed by a second in 1887 and a third matriculated in 1889. Yet, it wasn't until about 50 years after the third that a fourth black graduated from one of the academies. Blacks serving in the military in the early years was always based on need. Black troops served under George Washington and with Andrew Jackson at New Orleans. But, the first "large-scale reliance on blacks"<sup>3</sup> occurred during the Civil War. When the need continued for soldiers to help fight in the West, the Tenth Regiment, often called the Buffalo Soldiers, were called to the task and performed extremely well. They protected settlers, built outposts and fought Mexicans and Indians. The graduates from the academies provided the leadership. Once the goals were accomplished, the need and support for the Buffalo Soldiers no longer existed. This explains why the fourth black graduate from an academy didn't occur for another 50 years.<sup>4</sup>

In the next phase, "leveling the playing field,"<sup>5</sup> we legislated equal opportunity. Service to country in several wars caused our lawmakers to examine policy. Particularly because women as well as minorities were participating. Excluding them would have gone against what America had to offer to all its people. We see that the laws initially signed by Roosevelt and Truman were more symbolic than effective. Further legislation was enacted: Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Still, these acts didn't

meet the needs of minorities and women in the workforce. Thus, the Equal Employment Act of 1972 was signed. But, what happened with equal opportunity? “Representation of both females and minorities increased overall, but this growth was limited and uneven.”<sup>6</sup> Although making progress, females and minorities are still underrepresented at senior levels.

So, how has the military progressed since the 1970s? The percentage of blacks in the DOD increased from 14.8 percent in 1976 to 20.4 percent in 1991. Despite this improvement, it decreased to 19.3 percent by 1995. Although the numbers decreased overall, the percentage of black officers either increased or stayed the same. Contrary to the decreases in black representation, the percentage of Hispanics decreased from 1976-1985 but has been increasing steadily since 1985. From 1976 to 1995, representation of women increased from 5.4 to 12.6 percent. It is obvious the DOD continues to make progress and has recognized the contributions that all its members can make. This is evident by the recent (1993) elimination of the combat exclusion law for women.<sup>7</sup>

In the next phase, “tilting the playing field,”<sup>8</sup> equal opportunity was augmented by affirmative action. The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 called for a representational work force reflective of the nation. It provided specific criteria for evaluations in federal jobs and it provided use of numerical goals and timetables. These goals and timetables became the primary tools for affirmative action. “Even if the balance may seem in doubt at times, today’s public policy basically relies on equality of opportunity, as enhanced unevenly by goals and timetables that permit greater flexibility and room for maneuvering in cases of egregious exclusionism.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, what people most think of when they hear affirmative action, is quotas. This has caused conflict in organizations in that employees

may think certain minority members are getting promoted or compensated based on affirmative action goals. This same feeling is also evident in the military. The perception among some officers is that minorities and women have better promotion opportunities because of their race or gender.

Affirmative action has a mixed record. It was implemented by political action, thus it can be eliminated the same way. Affirmative action is one of the hot issues being debated in political forums today. The goals and timetables established by affirmative action opened doors of opportunity for some who had been excluded but this added focus on target groups in organizations, resulting in perceptions of lowering standards to accommodate minorities and women. Equal opportunity and affirmative action made progress in the early stages but there is a need to continue improvements in understanding diversity.<sup>10</sup>

We have moved past legislation and have now recognized that we must value the differences in people and between persons. Golembiewski calls this the “moving toward diversity-friendly relationships”<sup>11</sup> stage. He feels that the Civil Service Reform Act shifted the focus to individual differences. And, along these lines, the valuing of differences resulted in diversity training. Many organizations have made diversity training a standard for their supervisors and managers. This also includes the military. Each branch offers numerous courses dealing with different issues related to diversity such as sexual harassment, equal opportunity and treatment and managing cultural diversity. However, these training programs are usually limited in scope due to time and money. Understanding diversity and valuing differences cannot be taught in one 2-hour class. It requires individuals to examine their own background and relate them to factors such as

prejudices, stereotypes, etc. These factors will be discussed further in the next section when examining a model on the impact of diversity on organizations.

Finally, once we value differences in individuals, managing diversity in organizations would be the next step. In remarks given at a “Strength Through Diversity Conference” held in 1995, the Honorable Sheila E. Widnall, Secretary of the Air Force, stated, “Managing diversity does not mean changing valid expectations and standards for women and minorities. It simply recognizes the fact that some groups react differently to different situations, and we should try to reduce the frictions that may result.”<sup>12</sup>. Managing diversity can be reflected in different ways but one way is that a mission statement originated at the senior level concerning diversity will lay the foundation for the organization. Then, it is the responsibility of the top leadership to show a strong and continuing support for that mission statement. In reality, the bottom line is that managing diversity has an impact on organization performance and mission accomplishment because diversity affects the processes of problem solving, creativity and communications.

Historically, progress has been made. We have moved beyond mandatory legislation to understanding that valuing differences and managing diversity will be key in providing the impetus for the military to confront cultural diversity head on. Still and all, with the recent revelations of activities in the Army at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, many people will question the progress made in dealing with diversity. As such, an understanding of the impact of cultural diversity on organizations is critical to any leader or manager. In the next chapter, a model simplifying this impact will be presented and discussed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Golembiewski, Robert T. *Managing Diversity in Organizations*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995), 25

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>7</sup> Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, *DEOMI Statistical Series Pamphlet 96-1, Representation of Minorities and Women in the Armed Forces, 1976-1995* (DEOMI Research Directorate, Patrick AFB FL, Jan 96), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Golembiewski, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>12</sup> Widnall, Sheila E. Speech entitled *Setting the Example of Air Force Leadership Through Diversity*, (Strength Through Diversity Conference, United States Air Force Academy, April 1995).

## Chapter 3

### Impact of Diversity on Individuals and Organizations

There have been so many changes in the cultural make-up of organizations that it becomes imperative for leaders and supervisors to understand cultural diversity and how it can affect their organization. Cultural diversity has been defined as “the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance.”<sup>1</sup>

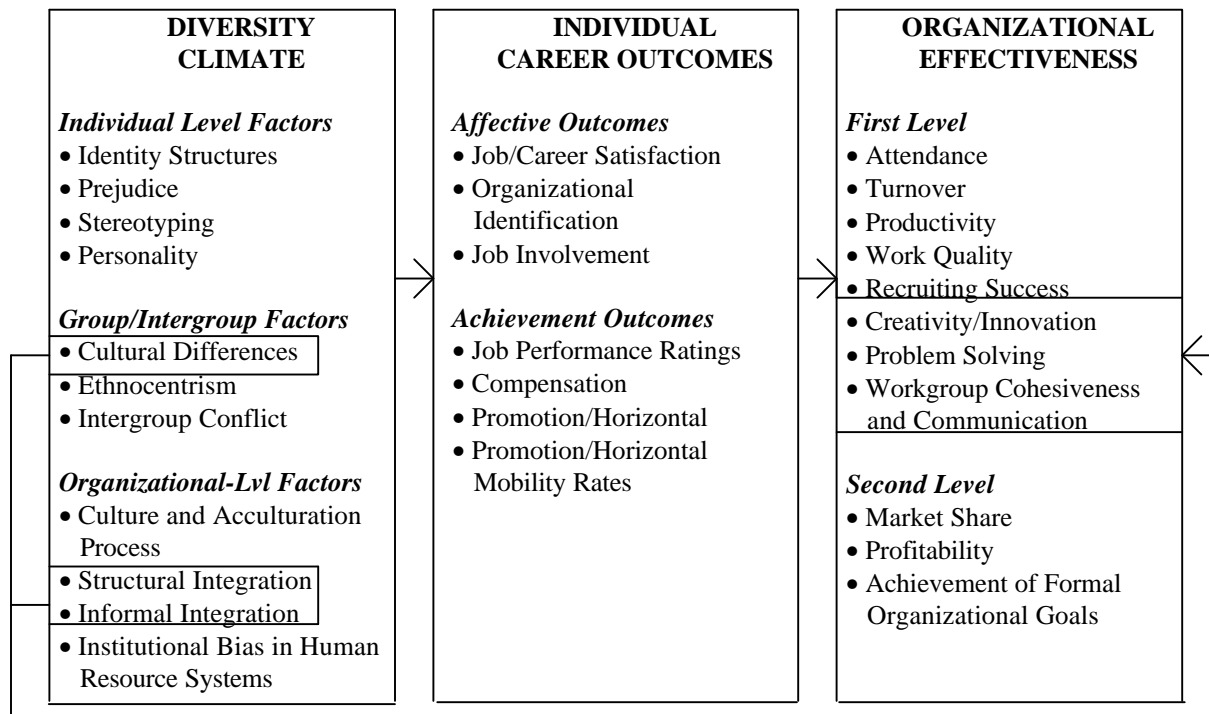
Researchers have gone further to define diversity in primary and secondary dimensions. Primary dimensions being age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, and sexual/affectional orientation. The primary dimensions “shape our basic self-image as well as our fundamental world view.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, they have the most impact on groups in the workplace and society. The secondary dimensions include educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, religious beliefs and work experience. These impact our “self esteem and self definition.”<sup>3</sup> These dimensions are not exact—there are times when the secondary dimensions will have as much impact as the primary dimensions.

In his book, *Cultural Diversity in Organizations—Theory, Research and Practice*, Dr. Taylor Cox, Jr. provides a conceptual model (Figure 1) showing the impact of diversity on an organization. He ties together his research and uses information on



gender, racioethnicity, nationality, age and other areas of diversity to create this model. When developing this model, not only did Cox use the traditional areas of diversity such as race, gender and nationality, he also used areas that are just as important in the military such as job function, background and values. Another point about this model is that it treats group identities in a more sophisticated way instead of the traditional way. For example, we have traditionally grouped people together based solely on physical characteristics such as black, white, or hispanic. Yet, this categorical treatment ignores how the individual identifies with the culture of the group. A final point about this model is that it proposes that the impact of diversity on an organization is an interaction of the environment and individuals.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1. Interactional Model of the Impact of Diversity on Individual Career Outcomes and Organizational Effectiveness**



**Source:** Loden, Marilyn and Judy B. Rosener, Ph.D. *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Homewood: Business One Irwin, 1991), 7.

The logic of the model shows that a person's group affiliations such as age, gender and race can be analyzed on three levels: individual, group/intergroup and organizational. These collectively will define the diversity climate of the organization. This climate may influence individual and organizational outcomes either as affective outcomes or achievement outcomes. These individual outcomes may impact organizational factors such as work quality and productivity.<sup>5</sup>

How does diversity effect organizational performance? As Cox's model suggests, "a set of individual, group and organizational factors interact to influence a set of individual outcomes that in turn influence organizational outcomes."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the individual and organizational outcomes can impact affective outcomes and achievement outcomes. Cox defines affective outcomes as to "how people feel and think about their jobs and their employers...what people believe about their opportunities in the work environment is of vital importance regardless of whether or not these beliefs are consistent with the facts."<sup>7</sup> If an individual feels valued by the organization, they will contribute more to meeting the goals of the organization. Cox defines achievement outcomes as "tangible measures that are, at least theoretically, indexes of the employee's contribution to the organization."<sup>8</sup> These can include performance ratings and promotion rates. So, according to the model, "by understanding the diversity climate we can predict effects on individual outcomes and ultimately effects of diversity on organizational effectiveness."<sup>9</sup>

There are direct effects of diversity on organizations. Processes such as problem solving, creativity and communications will be effected by diversity. These processes are critical to any organization and diversity can either complement these processes or provide

challenges to overcome. This is reflected in Cox's model by the arrow that extends from the diversity climate to the organizational outcomes.

Problem solving in a diverse group will provide different perspectives, provide more critical analyses of the alternatives and "lower the probability of groupthink."<sup>10</sup> It is necessary for the group to understand the differences of the other members of the group; otherwise, the group may have conflicts in trying to solve problems. Creativity may also be enhanced by a diverse group. But, the contributions of all members must be recognized so that individuals will want to share their creative ideas with the group. Finally, communications can pose an obstacle to a diverse group. "Communication differences related to culture may become the source of misunderstandings and ultimately lower workgroup effectiveness."<sup>11</sup> Once this is recognized, action can be taken to try to overcome these difficulties.

Examining selected factors from the diversity climate listed in the model and how they can be applied to the military will provide the foundation of how diversity can impact an organization. Specifically, identity structures, prejudice, stereotyping, ethnocentrism and informal integration will be defined. Although the other factors are also applicable to the military, because of the structured environment we operate in, change in those areas require more than self-examination.

## **Diversity Climate Factors**

### **Identity Structures**

"A group identity is a personal affiliation with other people with whom one shares certain things in common. Such identities are central to how cultural diversity impacts

behavior in organizations.”<sup>12</sup> The way we define ourselves can be based on our group affiliation. For example, I may think of myself as an officer in the Air Force which would be a group identity. This will play a part in how I define myself and how others see me. Another reason that group identities need to be recognized is that many individuals draw their self-esteem and personal pride from their affiliation with these groups. A final reason that group identities are important is that they will influence how others react with us. Just by being a member of the military, people I meet automatically draw certain conclusions about me.

There are different types of group identities: phenotype identity groups are visually distinguishable from members of other groups such as “women are physically distinguishable from men and thus gender represents a phenotype identity.”<sup>13</sup> Racioethnic groups often represent phenotype groups. Stereotyping and prejudice are usually activated on the basis of phenotype. Once we categorize people in this way, our minds may naturally recall any information about members of that group. This may cause us to interact with these individuals in a certain way. The other group is a culture identity group which has two components: culture identity profile which is the cultural group to which the person identifies and identity strength which refers to the value that the individual places on that particular group identity.<sup>14</sup>

### **Prejudice and Discrimination**

Cox refers to prejudice as “attitudinal bias and a means to prejudge something or someone on the basis of some characteristic...usually refers to negative attitudes toward certain groups and their members.”<sup>15</sup> In turn, discrimination refers to a bias someone may

have toward a person based on that person's group identity. Although these concepts are different, they are closely interrelated.

A Dutch researcher, Ijzendoorn (1989) found that persons with certain personality types are more prone to prejudice and discrimination. He found that authoritarian personalities are less tolerant toward members of minority groups than other persons. This is the *intrapersonal* source of prejudice.<sup>16</sup>

However, *interpersonal* sources as described by Cox are more relevant in this discussion on diversity. Cox states there are three sources of interpersonal prejudice: (1) perceived physical attractiveness, (2) communications proficiency and (3) legacy effects form the history of intergroup relations.<sup>17</sup>

Cox discusses studies in his book that have been conducted that show physical attractiveness and communications proficiency influence other people's views. Physically attractive people are viewed more positively and are better liked than physically unattractive people. Additionally, communications influence ones' attitude toward others. If someone doesn't have English as a first language, it may influence the way we treat them. We may find them inferior, not as intelligent and thus may try to avoid contact or limit our contact with them.<sup>18</sup>

Historical legacy is also a source of prejudice. There are two levels: micro referring to "identity-based experiences that many of us have in our own personal histories that partly shape our attitudes toward other groups."<sup>19</sup> Recently, I had the opportunity to supervise an officer who graduated from an all-male military college. He had never had a female supervisor or worked closely with female officers. He had some negative perceptions about female officers based on his background. This initially influenced our

working relationship. This is an example of the micro level of historical legacy. We worked through his negative perceptions and it resulted in a positive working relationship for both of us. We all have probably experienced some form of the micro level of historical legacy. The macro level refers to significant intergroup historical events that the individual was not a participant. For example, the World War II Japanese internment camps. Although many young Japanese Americans were not involved with the internment, it still plays an important role for the elder Japanese Americans which in turn influences the feelings of the young Japanese Americans toward others.<sup>20</sup>

It should be remembered that it isn't just majority groups that have prejudices against minority groups. It also works the other way—minority groups against majority groups. Cox feels that an understanding of how these prejudices are manifested and are created will help eradicate prejudice. This would include a self-awareness about our own attitudes and their sources about members of all groups.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, these prejudices are reinforced by societal factors. The media plays an important role in this area. Unfortunately, the media usually focuses on the negative aspects of any situation which in turn may influence negative attitudes toward any specific group.

These prejudices can result in subtle discrimination which refers to behavior toward an out-group that isn't overtly expressed. Cox provided an example of the effects of gender and leadership behavior. Studies show that men and women who used participative leadership styles were rated equally effective. Whereas, if a woman used an authoritarian style of leadership, she was rated negatively. Yet, if a man used the authoritarian style, he was rated positively. As Cox points out, "Members of

organizations must be educated to be more aware of these subtle forms of discrimination. Reactions to behavior must be observed with greater insight and sensitivity. Behaviors in ourselves and others must be challenged when there is the appearance of a double standard about accepted behavior.”<sup>22</sup>

In conducting in-depth interviews with middle and senior managers in a Fortune 500 firm, Cox suggests that prejudice and discrimination can impact an organization in several ways. Two of these are the impact on interpersonal trust and the impact on motivation.<sup>23</sup> Through my experience as a commander, I know that trust and motivation are interrelated and impact the effectiveness of a military unit. If a leader exhibits any prejudice or discrimination, subordinates will probably find it difficult to trust the leader. This, in turn, will influence the subordinate’s motivation and desire to be productive. The leader/subordinate relationship should be based on trust and free of prejudice or discrimination.

### **Stereotyping**

“Stereotyping is a process by which individuals are viewed as members of groups and the information that we have stored in our minds about the group is ascribed to the individual. Thus, while the emphasis in prejudice is on attitudes and emotional reactions to people, the emphasis here is on processes of group identity categorization and on the assumed traits of these categories.”<sup>24</sup> In simpler terms stereotyping is “a fixed and distorted generalization made about all members of a particular group.”<sup>25</sup>

While generalizations (sometimes viewed as a negative thing) are helpful in simplifying the world for us and helpful in making decisions, stereotypes are not. They are usually distortions and inaccuracies rooted in false assumptions and faulty analysis.

Therefore, recognizing stereotyping as what it is, in valuing diversity we must learn to base beliefs about characteristics of groups on reliable sources of data and information and realize that intragroup differences exist. Another fact that we must remember in valuing diversity is that “stereotypes represent not merely an acknowledgment of differences but also an evaluation of them.”<sup>26</sup> Usually this evaluation is seen in a negative context. The challenges to organizations is to acknowledge differences in positive terms.

Power struggles and role conflicts can be the result of stereotyping in organizations. For example, placing women, who stereotypically have had lower status than men in society, in senior management positions creates a status incongruence in the minds of many. This can cause difficulties in the leader/subordinate relationship and can cause power differences in an organization. This is done in such a way that members of minority groups may find it difficult to exert influence over decision processes in the organization. Additionally, role conflicts can arise when “roles that a person is expected to perform outside of work conflict with the expectations on the job.”<sup>27</sup> For example, former senior leaders initially did not support women in combat roles because they weren’t personally comfortable sending mothers and daughters into combat situations. It was difficult for them to envision mothers shooting guns and dropping bombs—this was a role conflict in their eyes.

“Because of the many myths and stereotypes that we carry with us into the workplace, it is likely that we will misinterpret or devalue some primary and secondary differences when we are finally exposed to them. As a result, we may find ourselves unable to establish productive working relationships with people of different core identities.”<sup>28</sup>



## **Ethnocentrism**

“Ethnocentrism is the proclivity [tendency] of viewing members of one’s own group (in-group) as the center of the universe, for interpreting other social groups (out-groups) from the perspective of one’s own group, and for evaluating beliefs, behaviors, and values of one’s own group somewhat more positively than those of out-groups.”<sup>29</sup> In simpler terms, ethnocentrism is the in-group being prejudice against the out-group. Cox discusses two aspects of human behavior that are not ordinarily associated with prejudice. The first being in-group/out-group bias. Typically, we have referred to ethnocentrism as having cross-national diversity. However, there are other boundaries such as work function and organizational level that can be the basis of stereotypes. This is pervasive in the Air Force. For example, rated versus non-rated, fighter pilots versus heavy-lift pilots, etc. Ethnocentrism doesn’t necessarily mean hostility toward out-groups but it may just be that with all things being equal we prefer to interact with individuals most like ourselves. In organizations, this could result in in-group favoritism being manifested. “Recognition of ethnocentrism is extremely important for building commitment to address diversity issues in organizations, especially for majority group members.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Informal Integration**

Informal groups play an important role in any organization. They influence both the success of the organization and the career success of individuals. We know that total quality initiatives depend heavily on employee involvement and informal networks can greatly impact this process. Informal groups are influenced by factors such as common language, perceived social similarity, and ethnocentrism. These social networks are critical for communication in organizations. It has been found that race has a significant effect on

social networking. This is not surprising as you would expect people to have a preference for interaction with members of one's own culture group, especially in an informal context. In my last assignment as the Commandant of Cadets at an Air Force ROTC detachment, informal groups were something that I had to continuously contend with. The corps had over 250 cadets and I was constantly working to eliminate cliques and preventing informal groups of establishing any kind of power base. Had these groups been able to establish a power base, the negative effect on the corps would have been tremendous.

## Summary

The model discussed in this chapter provides ideas for consideration about the impact of diversity on individuals and organizations. By examining different factors of the diversity climate such as identity structures, prejudice, stereotyping, ethnocentrism and informal integration, it will help us recognize certain areas where we might be deficient and begin to look critically at myths and preconceived ideas we may have about certain groups and cultures and how they may affect us as leaders and managers. Only when we can recognize these prejudgments for what they are can we begin to effectively deal with them. Then, we may be able to modify certain behaviors and become a more understanding, effective and fair supervisor.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cox, Jr., Taylor. *Cultural Diversity in Organizations—Theory, Research and Practice* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 1993), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Loden, Marilyn and Judy B. Rosener, PhD. *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Homewood: Business One Irwin, 1991), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20.

## Notes

- <sup>4</sup> Cox, 8.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9-10.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 39.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 43.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 65.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 67.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 68.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 70.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 75.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 81.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 88.
- <sup>25</sup> Loden and Rosener, 58.
- <sup>26</sup> Cox, 91.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 97.
- <sup>28</sup> Loden and Rosener, 24.
- <sup>29</sup> Cox, 130.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 133.

## Chapter 4

### Tools to Improve the Diversity Climate

Whether we were commissioned through the Air Force Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps or Officer Training School, we were all taught about leadership and leadership traits. We know that an effective leader is one that is able to motivate their subordinates to meet the mission goals. In the process of motivating subordinates, we learn to inspire and empower them and recognize that subordinate involvement is required. This kind of leadership has been defined as participative. Yet, in recognizing diversity issues that are prevalent in civilian businesses, as well as the military, we find it necessary to move beyond participative leadership. Marilyn Loden and Judy B. Rosener, in their book, *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource*, have labeled this new leadership as pluralistic leadership. Although pluralistic leadership emphasizes the same things as participative, it assumes that organizational change will be required for diversity to have a positive impact and at “the center of this change is the leader—inspiring commitment among others through personal and organizational proaction.”<sup>1</sup>

To further clarify pluralistic leadership characteristics, Marilyn Loden and Dr. Thomas A. Gordon conducted a study and interviewed over 200 individuals in 20 public and private institutions and surveyed another 450 employees. Their study found that six

dimensions were required for effective leadership in diverse organizations: vision and values that support diversity; ethical commitment to fairness; broad knowledge and awareness of diversity; openness to change; mentor and empowerer of employees; ongoing catalyst and model for organizational change.<sup>2</sup>

Although more applicable at the strategic level, these dimensions can be used to develop specific tools a leader can use on an individual level to improve the diversity climate in an organization and meet the dimensions for pluralistic leadership. While many different tools can be used, there are just a few that are more relevant in the military environment such as empowerment, diversity training programs, and mentoring/networks. Still, we also need to consider what we would do if we are commanders—that moves beyond empowering, training and mentoring. In her book, *The New Leaders—Leadership Diversity in America*, Ann M. Morrison provides five steps to develop diversity in an organization. Examining the tools of empowerment, diversity training programs, mentoring/networks and the applicability of the five-step process to the military environment will provide information that will be useful to leaders, commanders and supervisors.

## **Tools for Managing Diversity**

### **Empowerment**

If you have had any Quality Air Force training at all, you know that empowerment is essential in order to make effective quality decisions. All members, regardless of race or gender, should feel free to contribute in decision-making processes. A study on the “Equal Opportunity Climate and Total Quality Management,” was conducted by the

Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute. Three fairly diverse (43 percent minorities and 22 percent female) military units recognized for their TQM programs were studied. In this study, they found a “linkage of perception of minority power with quality for the minorities in the three quality units.”<sup>3</sup>

When using empowerment in diverse organizations, Golembiewski states that it should follow the “more, more hypothesis.” This hypothesis follows that the more you trust someone, the more others will reciprocate by trusting and being trustworthy. This has been seen in units by higher job satisfaction and higher productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Empowerment in a diverse organization is a “win-win” situation. Empowering diverse members and making them feel their contribution is meaningful and worthwhile, will only improve the diversity climate and thus improve mission accomplishment.

### **Diversity Training Programs**

Diversity training programs are used to make people more aware of pertinent issues in diversity. The Air Force training programs have progressed over a long period of time. Over 20 years ago the military had “Race Relations” courses and have since progressed to courses dealing with specific issues such as equal opportunity, sexual harassment and cultural diversity.

As a supervisor or leader, you have the responsibility to be well trained in the area of understanding diverse employees. All supervisors and leaders must take advantage of the training offered by their respective services. Basically this training will set the stage for policies and practices that shape people’s behavior. As discussed in Chapter 3, prejudice and stereotyping are the main barriers to a positive diverse climate. Training can be used

to enlighten members about positive aspects of various groups. In other words, training can be used to break down the stereotypes and reduce prejudicial attitudes.

### **Mentoring/Networks**

The Air Force has recognized the importance of mentoring and has taken initiative to establish a mentoring program. Although still in its infancy, mentoring can be a tool used by supervisors and leaders in improving the diversity climate.

Mentors provide support, challenges, and recognition to help shape the future for the individuals they are assisting. In a study done by Ann Morrison, “a lack of mentors and role models is a barrier for many white women and people of color. Nontraditional managers may especially need the guidance, encouragement, and advocacy that more seasoned managers can provide to overcome such hurdles as isolation, lack of credibility, and perhaps a naiveté about institutional politics.”<sup>5</sup>

Although the numbers of minorities in the military are increasing, the progress of these minorities rising to the top ranks has been slow. Considering how the promotion systems work in the different services, advancement of minorities can’t happen over night. It will take time but the services are progressing in the right direction. Because progress is slow, the use of mentors can be even more beneficial because it will help keep minorities on track and keep them focused.

Networking also provides forms of support to nontraditional groups. Internal networking groups can be used by traditional and nontraditional managers. Nontraditional managers can use these networking groups as a source of support and encouragement. They can introduce nontraditional employees to one another so “they can serve as counselors, cheerleaders, sounding boards, content experts and resources in other

capacities.”<sup>6</sup> Traditional managers can use these networking groups to find out about problems that may exist in the organization and then receive input on how to improve or correct the problems.

As a supervisor or leader, it is critical to be a mentor or encourage mentoring for your subordinates. Also, leaders and supervisors should support different networking organizations. These organizations provide support to the members as well as provide them a channel to voice complaints and problems to senior leadership.

These are tools that a supervisor or leader can use to improve the diversity climate in their office or organization. However, what can you do if you are made a commander and you have numerous offices or organizations under your command? Defining each step of the five-step process will show how this process can be effectively used in a military unit.

## **Five-Step Process**

### **Step One: Assess the Condition of Your Organization**

Because military units continually go through inspections and assessments, there are instruments available to commanders that will provide insight into the condition of their organization. The reports generated from these inspections or assessments will usually identify specific problems with production or compliance and can also show areas that are efficient and effective. Therefore, these reports can provide insight into negative or positive areas that could influence the diversity climate of an organization.

Another avenue available to commanders is the Military Equal Opportunity Climate Analysis Survey (MEOCS) program. “The MEOCS is an organizational development survey covering EO and organizational effectiveness issues.”<sup>7</sup> This is offered free to



commanders by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute who, in turn, will provide confidential feedback that consists of comparisons between unit and data base results, as well as internal comparisons (e.g., minority-majority, men-women).<sup>8</sup>

Once you have gathered as much information as possible, Morrison warns that you must keep assumptions under control, try to get more than just numbers—get perceptions too (MEOCS is a good tool for this) and don't get tied down to just gathering information.<sup>9</sup>

### **Step Two: Strengthen Top-Management Commitment**

Everyone in the organization must know that the senior leaders are committed to a positive diversity climate. We know that the Secretary of the Air Force, Sheila Widnall, and the Chief of Staff, Air Force, General Fogleman, are committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of race or sex, have the same opportunity to be a contributing member of the Air Force. This same commitment must be relayed down to the lowest levels. Senior leaders must strongly and openly support all diversity policies and practices that are mandated.

Secretary Widnall and General Fogleman have shown their commitment to cultural diversity making diversity a key issue. They are responding to problems that have arisen and they are desperately trying to make diversity an accepted way of life in the Air Force. As commanders and leaders, we have the responsibility to support our senior leadership policies and let our subordinates know through our actions that we believe in the benefits of cultural diversity.

### **Step Three: Choose Solutions**

After you have gathered all your information, choose solutions that address the data and culture. Some tools that could be used as solutions were discussed previously. Still, you must remember that you need to reach as many members of the organization as possible. Solutions can be difficult to impose especially if they are new and radical. Therefore, it is essential that everyone understand why these changes are being implemented and the rationale behind them. Comprehensive training and preparation must be accomplished to help facilitate this understanding.

### **Step Four: Revisit the Goals**

Creating meaningful goals can be a challenge. Yet, this is a requirement to measure success. Goals should be realistic and achievable within an established time frame. “The simple rule that ‘what doesn’t get measured doesn’t get done’ applies as well to diversity efforts as to other activities.”<sup>10</sup> You may need to relook at attitudes and perceptions to see how and if they have changed. You may want to see if the diversity climate has changed.

What’s important is that you determine progress. This is a requirement to ensure the members of your organization believe that you are serious about addressing problems.

### **Step Five: Keep Building**

You must think long-term. Although most of us are only in assignments for 2 or 3 years, by thinking long-term, you can develop a culture and attitudes that will permeate throughout the entire organization of the Air Force. As Morrison states, “Success begets success; building on progress already made can be accelerated; past achievements can be used to extend diversity beyond sex and ethnicity issues into the full range of diversity.”<sup>11</sup>

So, as you can see, these are five easy steps that can be effectively used to provide a road map in order to assess the diversity climate in an organization.

## Summary

Empowering, training and mentoring are tools that can be used to assist you in becoming that pluralistic leader who understands and finds diversity an asset to your organization. Additionally, the five-step process of assessing the organization, top-level commitment, choosing solutions, revisiting the goals and to keep building is a simple formula that the pluralistic leader can use on a continuous basis to encourage a positive diverse climate.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Loden, Marilyn and Judy B. Rosener, PhD. *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Homewood: Business One Irwin, 1991), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 182-183.

<sup>3</sup> Krouse, Stephen B. and Alvin and Patricia Smith. *Equal Opportunity Climate and Total Quality Management: A Preliminary Study* (DEOMI Research Directorate, Patrick AFB FL, 1994), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Golembiewski, Robert T. *Managing Diversity in Organizations* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995), 177.

<sup>5</sup> Morrison, Ann M. *The New Leaders—Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>7</sup> Landis, Dan and Rabi S. Bhagat, Editors. *Handbook of Intercultural Training, 2d Edition* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1996), 210.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>9</sup> Morrison, 169, 179.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 226

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 265

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

*The military had given African-Americans more equal opportunity than any other institution in American society. . . . Naturally, they flocked to the armed forces. When we come before Congress saying we have to cut the forces, you complain that we're reducing opportunities for blacks. . . . Now you're saying, yes, opportunities to get killed. But as soon as this crisis passes, you'll be back, worried about our cutting the force and closing off one of the best career fields for African-Americans.*

General Colin Powell (USA, Ret)  
Former CJCS

The above statement was made by General Powell in reply to Congress when he was questioned on the disproportionate number, as compared to the civilian workforce, of African-Americans in the military serving in the Persian Gulf. The point General Powell was trying to make to Congress is that the military has provided tremendous opportunity to minorities and women. The numbers will be more comparable when the civilian workforce starts offering the same opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

Because the military has been recognized as an environment where diverse populations can succeed, "some leaders and scholars have come to think of the military as a social laboratory, in which charged debates over gender roles and homosexuality and national service can not only be addressed but possibly resolved."<sup>2</sup> Thus far we have addressed some issues that are necessary in understanding the diverse climate that permeates the military today. Knowing how diversity has been handled in the military

since the late 1800s lays the foundation for understanding the impact of cultural diversity on organizations. Because the military has progressed from grudging acceptance to the stage of managing diversity, a further clarification of how specific factors such as stereotyping, prejudices and ethnocentrism provides additional ideas for leaders to consider when dealing with diversity. With this solid foundation, leaders can then use the tools of empowering, training and mentoring through the five-step continuous analysis of their organization to create a positive diverse climate.

The information presented is familiar to most people, yet information not thought about until a problem occurs. Hopefully, the information will serve as a reminder that we must be proactive in dealing with diversity and not wait for problems to happen. We, in the military, are fortunate enough to work in a diverse climate that is supposedly free from discrimination and prejudice and supports equal opportunity. As such, all supervisors and leaders have the responsibility to understand and manage diversity to ensure every member of the service feels that they have the same opportunities as everyone else.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Powell, Colin with Joseph E. Persico. *My American Journey* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 487-488.

<sup>2</sup> Moskos, Charles. "From Citizens' Army to Social Laboratory." *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol 17 (Winter 93), 90.

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